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New York

President: Mr. Opertti . . . . . (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Jamil Mahuad Witt, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Assembly will first hear an address by the Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador.

Mr. Jamil Mahuad Witt, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador, His Excellency Mr. Jamil Mahuad Witt, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mahuad Witt (*interpretation from Spanish*): When I assumed the presidency of my country less than two months ago, I recalled that in the tradition of the Aymara, an indigenous people of the Republic of Bolivia, a human being and a country — and, may I say, the United Nations — do their work if they manage to find harmony in seven fundamental fields.

For the Aymaras there is a type of harmony that rises from the head, and that is the harmony we need to maintain with our beliefs and principles.

There is a second type of harmony which goes from the feet down. That is the harmony we must maintain with nature, the Earth and the environment.

There is a third harmony that goes from the body out to the right side. That is the harmony we must have with our families, with those closest to us.

A fourth type of harmony moves towards the left. That is the harmony we must have with our neighbours, our colleagues at work and those others who, without being very close to us, surround us.

There is a fifth type of harmony which moves forward from us, and for the Aymara people that is harmony with the past. They believe that human beings face the past and not the future, because we can see what is in front of us, and the past is the only thing we can really see.

A sixth type of harmony is behind us. That is our harmony with the future, because although we do not see the future we have an intuition about it and a sense of it. Often, although it has not yet come, we can already feel its weight on our shoulders.

The seventh and final type of harmony is self-harmony, an inner harmony.

If we achieve harmony in those seven areas, we will have a harmonious body, a harmonious country and a harmonious world. It is with that vision that we have

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begun to govern in Ecuador; and I believe it is with that vision that the United Nations is doing its work.

We can discuss many issues here. I want to focus on two, both related to left-sided harmony — harmony with our neighbours, international harmony — and their implications for the development of our peoples.

In Latin America, as in many parts of the world, we face one of the gravest crises in our history. We have been considering the advantages of globalization. Now we are also suffering the problems of globalization. When we speak of a global system, we speak of a real network, which, like a large cobweb, encompasses us all. The problem with such a network is that wherever we touch or apply pressure to the web we produce a vibration and an impact throughout the web.

The great majority of the countries of Latin America have made enormous efforts to overcome the problems of previous decades. They have worked to reduce their fiscal deficits to a minimum, to open up to the global economy, to participate in trade and to share the principles of open, fair and transparent trade, free of discrimination. They have understood that integration is the tool for progress in the future. They have established regional markets, and now they seek a continental market. After so much effort, which at times has been costly in internal terms, we have found that that effort can be wasted, that it may not be a way out of our problems, because of an international crisis, which did not originate in our countries; it came from outside, but because of globalization, and the network connecting us, we are all affected.

We understand the mechanics of the system. We understand how something that affects markets in Asia has an impact on Latin America. Yet, while we understand the mechanics of the system, we cannot see its fairness. If while working together we encounter problems that do not originate in our region, we must ask the industrialized countries in particular to take decisions that will ensure that not all the countries of the world suffer to the extent that we are suffering now.

There is talk of risk of a global recession as severe as, or even more severe, than that of the 1930s. We see the stock markets of the largest countries of our region affected daily. We see a crisis that is already striking the industrialized countries. I think this is the appropriate forum for us to consider the need to work together. We small countries like Ecuador can do little in a crisis of this magnitude but call for reflection and true fraternity among our nations so that a problem affecting the whole world can be overcome. Otherwise, a crisis as big as this leaves many of us with no option but to wait and see how we can protect ourselves against these troubles.

The countries of Latin America see ourselves as a region, and we believe we must behave as a region. Every country has its own characteristics and has to do what is necessary individually, but it is the region as a whole that is being affected by all these changes.

The countries of Latin America have not come here simply to ask for money and loans, as they have done at other times of crisis. The countries of the region have not appeared here one by one to try to overcome their difficulties on an individual basis, as on other occasions. This time we have made joint proposals — just, global proposals. We hope these proposals will yield results.

All analysts maintain that unless interest rates are lowered, in particular in the industrialized countries, this global trend is undoubtedly not going to change. The 0.25 per cent drop in interest rates was widely considered important but insufficient in view of the magnitude of the current crisis. It is therefore crucial that we deal with this matter here in the Assembly.

Along with this international crisis, Ecuador is confronting an issue that is fundamental to its development: its relations with Peru, and the search for a definitive peace with Peru. We have a problem that has been dragged out over many decades. In its most recent stage, for the last 56 years, we have had a protocol of peace, friendship and boundaries, which should now enter a definitive phase. Peace is our objective; we see it as an ethical, moral and economic good. Nothing is more advantageous to the budgets of our countries than peace. We can do great things for the benefit of our economies.

In this case, peace is accompanied by a set of incentives, specifically, the possibility of $3 billion in loans from multilateral entities for border development projects, irrigation, roads, agricultural systems, schools and health centres, to give a few examples. This $3 billion — a very large sum for both countries — can be put into action if we achieve peace.

Over the past three years, we have been holding talks. Commissions have reached agreements on border integration, trade, navigation in the extraordinarily important basin of the Amazon river and measures of security and confidence-building for the future. But the

most delicate and difficult issue has yet to be resolved: the establishment of the borderline between the two countries. We have held talks at a number of levels — among our Foreign Ministers, in the negotiating commissions, among the countries that are guarantors of the protocol — and these conversations have also risen to the level of the presidencies of Peru and Ecuador. We have had three meetings in less than two months in order to seek that final agreement. Last night, I spoke with President Fujimori; he is planning to travel to the United States, and we agreed that tomorrow we will see each other here in New York for a fourth meeting to try to continue seeking the definitive formula that will resolve the question of our border in a way that is fitting, acceptable to the two countries and appropriate for our peoples.

The principles are clear. As countries, we cannot enter the twenty-first century dragging with us problems that date back to the nineteenth. We must embark on the twenty-first century with a clear and positive vision that is directed towards the future.

We share all the tenets of the United Nations on issues related to this one. We are completely in agreement with the Ottawa Convention on the question of landmines. Our country signed that Convention, and at the end of last week in Brasilia, the Presidents of Peru and Ecuador submitted to President Cardoso of Brazil a joint communiqué requesting that plans be drawn up for the removal of all the landmines that have been placed in the border area over the years. This is a positive and very real step; it means that the Convention will not simply be signed and ratified but will also be applied in practical terms in the field.

We are also completely in agreement with the proposals of the United Nations on the reduction of military budgets and expenditures. We believe that money should be invested in poverty reduction and in the social programmes and projects our peoples need so much. We are completely in agreement with the conventional disarmament programmes. We believe that trust must replace distrust, and we believe that this task, accomplished jointly, can allow us to leave behind long decades of mutual suspicion and the great scepticism that sometimes pervades our countries. We are in agreement as regards general and complete disarmament. We agree with the prohibition of nuclear weapons. We welcome the decision of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) to make all the countries of that region into a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

We believe in peace, and we are working to achieve it. It will be hard to find, in the future, two Presidents of neighbouring countries with a history of problems who are so firmly committed to peace, so deeply convinced that they must achieve peace, and so zealously at work to reach a speedy, just and honourable peace. We hope our efforts will soon meet their reward.

We completely support the initiatives of the United Nations on the subject of the protection of human rights. Ecuador has adopted its own national human rights plan into law. We are the second country in Latin America, and one of the first in the world, to adopt such a plan. It is not a plan of the Ecuadorian Government, but a plan made by Ecuadorian society, coordinated by the Ministry with the participation of representatives of various sectors of the society. We believe in human rights, and we defend them in their entirety and without reservation. Our Minister for Foreign Affairs was the first United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights before joining our Ministry for Foreign Relations, so our support in this field is complete.

In addition, we are concerned about the issue of sustainable development, and we will vigorously promote environmental issues. For the first time in history, a woman from a country that is not in the northern hemisphere has become chairperson of the world's largest intergovernmental organization on the environment. That woman's name is Yolanda Kakabadse, and she is the present Minister of the Environment in Ecuador. We seek to indicate several things by this, which are easily understandable in what I have just said.

These are the central issues in the link between the United Nations and my country: peace, the international crisis and the search for a just global accord, the environment and human rights. Other issues could be taken up, but I prefer to focus on this message.

I believe that there is no better way to pay tribute to the United Nations and to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than for two countries with democratically elected Governments to seek peace and endeavour to sign a peace agreement — perhaps sign one this year — so that the development of our peoples can proceed and their quality of life can improve.

In this way we can sum up the most important human rights. Democracy, freedom, development, life, the right to work, gender-related issues, the problems of

minorities and the most disadvantaged groups and the protection of children are encompassed in these words that are so simple and so important: peace, development and international cooperation. We want to emphasize these ideas here, in this Organization which has done so much to bring them about throughout the world.

I wish the Assembly every success in its work for the benefit of all of humanity.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jamil Mahuad Witt, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Comoros, His Excellency Mr. Salim Hadji Himidi, on whom I now call.

Mr. Himidi (Comoros) *(interpretation from French)*: Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, on behalf of the people and Government of my country, the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros, to extend my sincere condolences to all the States and peoples who have suffered devastation from Hurricane Georges, and to the victims of the floods in the People's Republic of China and in Bangladesh.

I am pleased to be able to join with the distinguished and worthy representatives of States and Governments who have preceded me at this rostrum in extending to you, Sir, on behalf of the President of the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros, His Excellency El Hadj Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim, my warm congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third regular session.

I also pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, as well as to the greatly respected Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of our Organization, for the dedication, skill and other outstanding qualities which they have shown in carrying out their respective functions.

My country, which is located at the north-west entrance to the Mozambique Channel, half way between the East African coast and the large island of Madagascar, small, fragmented and geographically isolated though it is, was accepted to full membership in the United Nations on 12 November 1975 by resolution 3385 (XXX), as a State comprising the islands of Anjouan, Grande-Comore — also known as Ngazidja — Mayotte and Mohéli.

We should also note that from 1889 until the referendum through which my country acceded to independence, all the laws and other regulatory texts applied by the former colonial Power recognized and sanctioned the territorial unity and integrity of the archipelago of the Comoros.

Thus for 23 years, at each of the regular sessions of this Assembly, successive resolutions have been adopted recalling that the continuation of the legal, administrative and military hold of the former colonial Power over the Comorian island of Mayotte is a flagrant violation of resolution 1514 (XV) and of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. We therefore hope that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Ad Hoc Committee of Seven on the Question of the Comorian Island of Mayotte, presided over by His Excellency Mr. Omar Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon, will resume its work and re-establish the dialogue between the Comoros and France on this question.

Finally, we appeal to the wisdom and goodwill beyond our continent, so that the Comoros can return once and for all to the path of peace, security and hope. I should like solemnly to appeal to this Assembly for assistance to my country so that a solution to the problem caused by its dismemberment can be found and my country can enter the twenty-first century as a reunited country.

The people, Government and head of State whom I am honoured and privileged to represent here today would like to express, through my delegation, their gratitude and acknowledgement to the Secretary-General of our universal Organization for the clarity and lucidity of his analysis of the causes of conflict on the African continent and for his courageous initiatives in the search for peace and sustainable development in Africa and throughout the world. In this context, we urge the United Nations system and its specialized agencies to do all in their power to ensure the rapid and complete implementation of all of the recommendations provided

by the Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council which he presented last April.

My Government urgently appeals to the international community for cooperation to effectively combat terrorism in all its forms. Only international determination, with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, will make it possible to put an end to horrendous terrorist acts. Terrorism spares no part of the world and no stratum of society. Who can forget the murderous acts committed this summer in Omagh, Ireland; Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam; Cape Town, South Africa; and Luxor, Egypt? For our part, my Government is cooperating openly and fully with the American authorities to shed light on the suspected participation of a national of my country in the abhorrent crimes committed in East Africa.

Since my country is a telling example of the hotbeds of tension which are now mobilizing the resources of the international community, I should like to recall that for a year and a half now the Organization of African Unity has taken up — in close cooperation with the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and, very recently, the Non-Aligned Movement — the separatist crisis on the Comorian island of Anjouan and the links to be established with the dismemberment of our archipelago State by the island of Mayotte's continuing to be under foreign administration.

The efforts and commitments of the Secretary-General of the OAU, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, and his Special Envoys, Ambassador Pierre Yéré and Mr. Mamoudou Kane, since the beginning of the crisis, as well as the efforts of the Governments involved in regional coordination to resolve the crisis in the Comoros, namely, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles, have been recognized and deserve admiration and support.

My country's people, Government and head of State would like to convey through my delegation to the entire international community their commitment to peace and unity and reconciliation between the community of islands which make up the nation of the Comoros.

Special mention should be made here of the most respected statesman of our world, President Nelson Mandela, who, in his dual capacity as head of State entrusted with regional coordination to resolve the crisis in the Comoros, mandated by the OAU, and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, has agreed to bring to bear his full authority and his personal prestige throughout the world to call upon the parties in conflict in the Comoros to conclude a peace of the brave, in which there is neither victor nor vanquished, peace brought about for the greatest possible benefit of the inhabitants of our archipelago State.

In the light of the claims and the rights acknowledged by our institutions, traditions, conventions and customs in a multi-island society, El Hadj Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim, President of the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros, declared after the OAU summit in Ouagadougo, and again recently in Durban during the NAM summit, that he was ready to work in a spirit of openness and reconciliation for greater decentralization and autonomy for each of the four islands making up our archipelago State. Thus each of our islands will be able to elect a governor and a local legislative assembly to deal with all matters relating to the immediate and particular concerns of each of our communities of the islands of the archipelago State. An inter-island commission will work for the equitable and proportional distribution of the international community's resources and investments.

Here I quote what El Hadj Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim has rightly said, as follows:

> "This is an issue of bringing the administration closer to its subjects, promoting the responsibility within a single citizenry and restoring the federal bodies of a united State their fundamental roles of organization, arbitration and the management of international sovereignty.
>
> "The future of our country will only be ensured when all opinions and all trends, in an atmosphere of greater tolerance, are accepted and fulfilled."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

> "Thus have We made of you
> An *Unmat* justly balanced.
> That ye might be witnesses
> Over the nations,
> And the Messenger a witness
> Over yourselves". (*The Holy Koran, II:143*)

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Paskal Milo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania, on whom I now call.

Mr. Milo (Albania): Allow me first, Sir, to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I am sure that your leadership constitutes a guarantee of continued success.

At the same time, I would like to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, for his excellent leadership during the fifty-second session.

Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

It is a special pleasure for me to address the Assembly in this session, which coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights. Although decades have passed, this document remains profoundly relevant to our world today. In fact, its standards continue to be an essential guide for evaluating the development and emancipation of human society. The Member countries of the United Nations should be proud of this document's lasting legacy.

While affirming the ongoing importance of the Declaration, I would like to stress the need for the UN's system of values to undergo an ongoing harmonization with new challenges. In this framework, on behalf of the Government of Albania, I commend the efforts made under the leadership of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, in the process of reform of our Organization. We hail the positive results achieved so far, and encourage the United Nations to continue to respond concretely to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Nearly three weeks ago Albania once again attracted the attention of the United Nations due to the violent events aimed at striking a blow against the fragile democratic institutions that were under the process of restoration from the deep crisis my country passed through last year. Certain political forces that lost their power in last year's free elections obviously encouraged the attack and occupation of the main State institutions.

That attempt to overthrow violently the legitimate Albanian Government was condemned by the whole democratic world, which strongly supported the President of the Republic in his endeavour to reestablish the political equilibrium that had been deeply disturbed and to guarantee the normal and democratic functioning of State powers and institutions. We highly appreciate this, and thank the international community for the support offered to Albania during its difficult days, and we welcome the establishment of the group of Friends of Albania. We view this as an important instrument in our common efforts for the stability of Albania and the consolidation of State structures and institutions.

We are conscious of the difficulties and negative phenomena with which we are coping. We are painfully aware that the civilian population of Albania continues to be considered the most armed in Europe. This is a reality which we have to face every moment. Taking into account the threat that this poses not only to Albania but also to the security of the region, our Government has appealed the United Nations for assistance in this regard. Allow me on this occasion to thank the Secretary-General for the seriousness with which he has dealt with this problem, and the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Dhanapala, for the mission he led to Albania. I want to express our readiness to work together with the United Nations to collect the weapons which fell into the hands of the civilian population during the political unrest of 1997.

I want to state that my Government is working diligently to establish the long-term rule of law in our country. Through lengthy deliberations among Albania's political forces, we have made an extensive endeavour to draft a constitution that recognizes the need to share political power and to secure human rights. It is my sincere hope that by the end of this year the Albanian people will be able to express their views on the proposed draft constitution. The adoption of a constitution ratified by the people of Albania that recognizes the fundamental rule of law and protects liberties will prepare Albania for complete integration into international structures. Most important, this path offers the best and brightest hope for our country.

I want also to address Albania's economic situation. Rebuilding the economy has been the highest of priorities for the Albanian Government, especially since the fall of the pyramid schemes which led to widespread micro- and macroeconomic collapse and to the impoverishment of many Albanians. Our response to this crisis was direct and decisive: in exposing the deceit of the pyramid schemes, in closing down the pyramid structures and in rebuilding trust in the Albanian economy. In cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the assets of those firms were audited, and we initiated the process of returning liquid assets to legitimate creditors. Now I can declare with conviction that pyramid-scheme-based businesses do not exist in our country any more. We are working at present to create

new, active policies for employment, self-employment and professional training.

The task of rebuilding Albania's economy constitutes a great challenge that requires the support of the international community. The Government has worked diligently to break down Albania's decades of isolationism and to become part of the world community of nations. The main directions of our policy so far have been the following.

First, the engagement of Albania in Euro-Atlantic integration is aimed at the creation of acceptable national standards in accordance with the common Euro-Atlantic values of common security, human rights standards, and the promotion of the liberal market-economy policies.

Secondly, Albania's cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has also had concrete results, expressed in successful cooperation, in the framework of the Partnership for Peace, on the qualification of the Albanian army and police. The first Albanian company of peacekeepers has in fact made tangible progress in that direction.

And thirdly, our cooperation with the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has been further strengthened. It includes their assistance not only in the shaping and improvement of Albanian legislation, but also in monitoring the application of common standards. I take this opportunity to thank those institutions for their assistance and to express once again the willingness and the political commitment of our Government to raise the quality of this cooperation in the future.

Albania's cooperation with the European Union in the economic area remains a basis for multilateral cooperation. We consider membership in the World Trade Organization to be vital in furthering the liberalization of Albanian trading markets. In the meantime, we have strengthened our relations with international financial institutions, which have committed major financial resources to the economic development of Albania.

On this occasion, please allow me to express my gratitude for the approval of the first United Nations Development Programme country cooperation framework for Albania, and my desire for the further strengthening of cooperation between Albania and the United Nations system. Albania now has serious and powerful partners for the development of our country. The Rome and Brussels conferences will be followed by another follow-up conference in Tirana, at which we will assess our progress and make new commitments for the future.

Turning to matters of international policy, the Albanian Government has devoted much effort to regional concerns. Southeastern Europe has inherited a series of problems which are the political, economic, social, psychological and institutional legacy of the communist era. However, we are deeply convinced that there are ways and means to build up confidence, cooperation and friendship among the Balkan nations. Albania has embraced enthusiastically all the initiatives which cultivate peace and cooperation in southeastern Europe, such as the Central European Initiative, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation process, the South-East European Cooperative Initiative, the Royaumont Platform for Action and the process of Balkan cooperation. All these initiatives will contribute to transparency of borders, free movement of goods, people and opinions among the countries of the region, and the setting up of common values on trade, transport, energy, telecommunication and the environment that will lay down the infrastructure for stability and peace in the region.

Towards this goal, we have worked on substantially improving bilateral relations with our neighbours. Significant steps were taken last year concerning relations with Italy, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on which a great number of cooperative agreements were signed. Close partnership relations have developed with Turkey, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia, *et cetera*.

Although I am underlining these positive and encouraging aspects of regional cooperation in general, and especially of Albania's relations with its neighbours, we cannot ignore the fact that in the Balkans there still exist enclaves where fundamental human and national rights and freedoms, including the right to life, are brutally violated every day. I am, of course, referring here to the problem of Kosovo.

I would like to confirm the conviction of the Albanian Government that during the past months of the Kosovo crisis, Belgrade has ignored the appeals of the international community to find an appropriate solution to that situation, and has systematically destroyed the alternative of a peaceful solution, thus encouraging the option of violence. Some days ago, the Security Council adopted its resolution 1199 (1998), attributing the main

responsibility and blame for what is happening in Kosovo to the authorities in Belgrade. That resolution testified to unanimous political will on the part of the international community to act strongly to find a peaceful, political solution to the conflict, and left open the option of using other means if failure is repeated.

We hope that this time the clear warning given by Security Council resolution 1199 (1998), the Council's strong message issued yesterday and the warnings given by the NATO and world leaders, will be the last ones necessary to impose a political solution on the authorities in Belgrade, something which they cannot realize by themselves of their own will.

The political archives of Belgrade are quite rich with false manoeuvres and untrue statements. The so-called withdrawal of special Serbian police forces from Kosovo and the end of fighting against so-called terrorists is a new version of them. This is an old scenario of a Bosnian type, and we Albanians have ample reasons not to believe it.

What is happening today in Kosovo is the story of a tragedy foretold. Milosević has in fact ordered the implementation of his "ethnic cleansing" policy against Albanians under the pretext of combating so-called Albanian terrorism. This has so far proved to be a constant element of his strategy. In that way, Serbian propaganda has been trying to justify the indiscriminate attacks, massacres and atrocities of the Yugoslav army against the Albanian population of Kosovo, such as the ones seen lately in the media. Newborn children, pregnant women and elderly persons have been massacred in a bestial way. The Albanian Government strongly condemns this policy and openly declares that Milosević should be held accountable and responsible for genocide.

The Albanian Government urges the following. First, there should be strong and extensive international monitoring and assisting presence in Kosovo. The nature of this presence should be in accordance with the developments in the situation there. Secondly, there should be an immediate NATO military intervention for peace enforcement in Kosovo, as peaceful measures applied by the international community have so far failed. Thirdly, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia should start an investigation in accordance with her mandate in order to indict Milosević as a war criminal.

The current conflict in Kosovo, as rightly pointed out in the resolutions and presidential statement of the Security Council, may have a strong spillover danger. The neighbouring countries are directly affected not only by the wave of refugees, but also by its impact on the ethnic and political relations inside these countries. We have already been witness to these effects.

Albania has made its position quite clear. We are in favour of an immediate end to the conflict and the initiation of negotiations between Belgrade and Priština with the international involvement of a third party. This would guarantee their success. The negotiations should define the future status of Kosovo. The Albanian Government strongly believes that any solution to the Kosovo crisis should take into consideration and respect the will of its inhabitants for self-determination in accordance with the relevant international conventions.

Humanitarian problems have always been the focus of attention of our Organization, which has also gained valuable experience on how to deal with them. I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to one the most acute developments which has already been the object of attention in United Nations bodies. Thousands of Kosovo Albanians — women, old people and children — have left their country and have gone as refugees to Albania, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Hundreds of thousands of others are now homeless, driven to wander in the forests and mountains of Kosovo, constantly facing terror and death; and it is now almost winter.

In spite of the known difficulties, the Albanian Government has taken all possible measures to cope with the difficult situation which was created as a result of the influx of Kosovo refugees in northern Albania. Albania, in cooperation with specialized agencies, has actually created suitable conditions to face the urgent need for food and temporary shelter. We appeal to these agencies to continue their assistance until this refugee crisis is resolved and Albanians can safely return to their homes.

We are convinced that the United Nations and the Security Council will fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with the United Nations Charter in the efforts to overcome the Kosovo crisis, which in fact has become a crisis of the Balkans and Europe. It is high time the United Nations and other international forums urgently intervened for the restoration of peace; otherwise we risk having a wider conflict.

On this occasion, I would like to thank the Security Council once again for the adoption of resolution 1199

(1998) and to commend in particular the initiators of that resolution, which constitutes an essential step in bringing peace to Kosovo and stability to the region.

Albania, like many other countries, is being affected by a set of phenomena such as drugs, illegal trafficking and organized crime. The Albanian Government has taken determined measures and is predisposed to cooperate with other countries to fight against these social scourges. We held a special session of the General Assembly this year devoted to the fight against drugs, as well as an open debate in the Security Council on children in armed conflicts. These efforts testify to the special attention paid to these social problems, and our Government hails them.

We appreciate the debate held by the Security Council on Africa, the System-wide Special Initiative on Africa and the engagement of the United Nations system for peace and development in Africa, a continent with incredible natural and human potentials.

My country also desires a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East and the restarting of the dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, in conformity with the relevant international agreements and resolutions of Security Council.

We believe that the international community has often acted insufficiently in punishing the perpetrators of and the people politically responsible for crimes against mankind. Consequently, we appreciate the efforts made by the United Nations for the establishment of an International Criminal Court, and we consider this a process of strengthening the conscience of the international community, as well as a step forward in creating a collective positive reaction against such crimes.

The Albanian Government is of the opinion that the institutional reform of the United Nations is an ongoing process which is affected by the ever changing real world. The United Nations will be better able to face the new challenges of the new millennium if the intergovernmental institutions of the United Nations become even more democratic in their structure.

One key area of such reform is the Security Council. Albania follows attentively the proceedings of the Working Group for the restructuring of the Security Council and the efforts made to find a solution to this question. We are of the opinion that any decision to reform the Security Council should have the widespread support of member countries and must take into account the new realities that are occurring in international relations.

The reform of United Nations, and especially of the Security Council, will be a reality only if there is a general will to provide the United Nations with the necessary political support. Only then will this Organization lead our world to the common goal of the creation of a global society of sovereign nations based on the rule of law, respect for human rights, personal and religious liberties, economic prosperity and international peace.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is the Chairman of the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. George Winston McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie (Trinidad and Tobago): It gives me great pleasure to extend to Mr. Didier Opertti warmest congratulations on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on his election as President of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. Trinidad and Tobago is indeed heartened to see one of its regional neighbours in this post, more so given the close ties of friendship which exist between Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. I am convinced that under his astute guidance the deliberations of the Assembly will be managed with the same skill and diplomacy with which he is known to discharge his duties of office.

I also take this opportunity to express deep appreciation for the manner in which his predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, undertook the tasks of office during his tenure as President of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. The impact of his leadership and the achievements of the Assembly during the last session of the General Assembly can only redound to the benefit of this body.

The United Nations has grappled, over the past 53 years of its existence, with myriad issues confronting the international community — old issues and new issues, especially those which have taken on a new dynamic in the international relations of our Member States. Having successfully manoeuvred through the high seas of the cold war, the United Nations continues to confront issues of direct concern to all its Member States. In striving to attain its goals of international peace and security and justice for all, which are the raison d'être of the United Nations, this most valuable Organization to all of the world's peoples is now drawn to focus on development

as a necessary precondition to the achievement of international peace and security.

We are now called upon to focus attention on the deep-seated problems of the global community. These include the alleviation of poverty; drug abuse and illicit drug-trafficking; environmental degradation; economic growth and social development of developing countries; and; more recently, the effects of the international financial crisis. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is of the view that these challenges can be successfully addressed only through international cooperation. No individual state or region can in isolation rid itself of these problems.

One of the principal tenets of international peace and security is the rule of international law. For too long, blatant disregard for international law has led to heinous crimes which have shocked the conscience of mankind, many of which have remained unpunished. Perpetrators of genocide, of crimes against humanity and of war crimes have acted with impunity, causing untold human suffering and loss of life on a massive scale.

Each life lost, each soul affected, each family, society or country touched by tragedy is one too many. The international community has not, until now, established a permanent mechanism to punish the perpetrators of these unspeakable crimes.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is proud of the role played by Mr. Arthur Robinson, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in refocusing the attention of the international community in 1989 on the need for the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court.

We congratulate the ever increasing number of States which have worked assiduously since then to ensure the establishment of a permanent, independent and effective International Criminal Court. At the same time, we urge all States to continue, in the spirit of cooperation and compromise which ensured the success of the Rome Conference in July 1998, to complete the work that still remains to be done. In this quest, we all must be ever mindful of the continued threats to international peace and security as well as breaches of international justice, which are occurring even as we meet today.

When the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago urged the international community to create a permanent International Criminal Court, it was in part a recognition of the gravity of the scourge of drug trafficking and its attendant ills, and of the pressing need for the Court to address the question of the punishment of individuals responsible for these crimes at an international level. At the Diplomatic Conference held in Rome, Trinidad and Tobago, with the support of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member States and some other States, was successful in ensuring that the international community did not lose sight of the importance of the inclusion of the crimes of the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs within the jurisdiction of the Court. As a result, the Diplomatic Conference recommended that an acceptable definition and the inclusion of drug crimes be considered by a review conference to be convened after the entry into force of the Statute.

Drug trafficking and the associated crimes of money-laundering and trafficking in arms continue to pose serious threats to the social, economic and political foundations of countries of the Caribbean, and to erode the moral fabric of our societies. We welcome the conclusions and recommendations of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in June 1998, and we pledge our commitment to cooperate at the international, regional and national levels in the achievement of the goals and ideals which we adopted at that session.

Trinidad and Tobago will persist in its efforts on a regional basis to foster the type of cooperation that would combat the scourge of drug trafficking. Such action includes the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action, which facilitates effective drug control cooperation in the region. Also, CARICOM countries, with the assistance of the Governments of Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, have created a witness protection programme. In addition, Port of Spain is the headquarters of the secretariat of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force on money-laundering.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is cooperating at the bilateral level with the three countries just mentioned in areas such as extradition and maritime counter-drug operations. We are also the beneficiary of technical assistance in the strengthening of our Counter Drug Crime Task Force to facilitate our efforts in addressing this menace to society.

Action at the national level includes the establishment of an agency to coordinate the overall efforts against drug-trafficking and the preparation of a

master plan to deal with the problem. A strong legal framework has been put in place to enable prosecutions and investigations. Appropriate legislation to facilitate judicial cooperation with other countries and participation in regional and multilateral institutions has also been enacted. Legislation currently before Parliament will significantly improve the provisions against money-laundering.

The eradication of drug-trafficking, money-laundering, and the traffic in arms and their associated evils must be a task for all Member States. The deleterious effects on our small societies threaten future generations of our peoples and have significant negative repercussions on our vulnerable economies. The eradication of this affliction of our societies is a *sine qua non* for development and for the achievement of international peace, security and justice.

Trinidad and Tobago shares the sadness, shock and outrage of the international community at the recent terrorist attacks on United States embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, as well as at the bombings in South Africa and in Ireland. This spectre of terrorism continues to rear its ugly head in our world, in spite of the numerous efforts that have been undertaken on a multilateral level to eradicate this evil.

At the second informal consultations of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations, held in New York on 24 September 1998, Caribbean Community Foreign Ministers condemned the recent terrorist attacks in several parts of the world and reiterated their strongest commitment to the fight against international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. They also pledged that their respective Governments would consider acceding to relevant international conventions and protocols on international terrorism. The Ministers reaffirmed that the most effective way to confront international terrorism is through an enhanced multilateral approach and multilateral actions, and with appropriate oversight and accountability measures.

International conferences have also attempted to draw up a blueprint for addressing the environmental problems that plague the nations of the world. In 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio, the international community for the first time linked environmental and economic issues. The Barbados Programme of Action adopted two years later, which addressed the specific problems of small island developing States, complements Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development adopted at Rio. The small island developing States (SIDS) Programme of Action, which is to be reviewed at a special session of the General Assembly next year, is therefore of critical importance to small island States. We anticipate that the results of the review will be more promising than those of Agenda 21.

The pace of globalization and economic liberalization has heightened the economic problems that developing countries face. This is evidenced in, among other things, the collapse of the financial markets, the unfair terms of trade and the developing countries' increasing difficulty in accessing the markets of the developed countries. The crisis presently facing many States and the gathering gloom over the world economy pose very real dangers for developing countries and therefore call for properly devised strategies and the establishment of new mechanisms to ensure our survival.

Recent developments within the international economic and financial arena are clear indications that the world economic system is crying out for urgent change. The imperfections, which are becoming increasingly glaring, can no longer be ignored. We cannot simply bear witness to the events. We must act now or lose a golden opportunity to influence the changes which are in the best interest of all humanity. We must have healthy, constructive dialogue at all levels and develop the political will and direction to find relevant solutions.

To this end, I wish to reiterate the call made by the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Ralph Maraj, at the Twelfth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held last month in Durban, South Africa, for the convening of a United Nations conference on the world economy. It is evident from the views expressed from this podium during the last two weeks that Member States recognize the need for urgent action at the international level to address this issue.

In this volatile economic environment, small island developing States are rendered even more vulnerable by their inherent features of size, remoteness, insularity and susceptibility to natural disasters. Indeed, in one fell swoop any small advances in economic development can be brought to nought by natural disasters. The devastation wreaked by the recent Hurricane Georges on small States of the Caribbean bears sad testimony to this reality. Trinidad and Tobago shares the grief of its Caribbean neighbours at the loss of life and the damage to property suffered in this hurricane. As is the case with other developing countries, the needs of small island developing States cannot be addressed without the full support and cooperation of the international community.

Trinidad and Tobago continues to make every effort to provide assistance to the islands affected by this disaster, in cooperation with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, a regional agency established to deal with all types of disasters.

Trinidad and Tobago has succeeded to some extent in achieving integration into the world economy as it undertakes the transition from an oil-dependent, public-sector dominated economy to a more diversified market-oriented private-sector led one. There is still a pressing need, however, for employment-generating growth from non-traditional labour-intensive sectors which will have more pointed impact on the reduction in poverty and unemployment levels in our country.

Our people are hurting. It is imperative therefore that the United Nations programmes for development be directed more specifically towards employment creation opportunities for our peoples.

Trade policy is an important area of concentration of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Developing countries, including small island States, are being asked to compete with developed countries while unequal levels of economic development persist — and to do so in a very difficult economic environment and within unrealistic time-frames. Small States must adopt a series of policy changes to reorient their economies and diversify their production bases. While implementing these measures, they must also develop their internal capacities to deal simultaneously with such policy changes. This cannot be achieved in the short term without a high degree of support from the regional and international organizations and the international community as a whole.

It is imperative that we find innovative ways to bridge the gap between the United Nations and private citizens. It is in this context that we welcome the establishment of the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships, which will strengthen partnerships to support the United Nations and its projects and deliver resources to programmes and peoples served by United Nations agencies. The approval of grants for projects in the broad categories of children's health, environment and climate change, women and population, food security, drug control, poverty alleviation and landmines will contribute significantly to the pursuit of the goals of the United Nations. The establishment of this Fund is testimony to what can be achieved by a shared vision and commitment to the principles and ideals of the Organization. We urge optimum use of the benefits to be derived from the Fund.

As we observe the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, Trinidad and Tobago would like to restate its commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights and the fundamental freedoms of its citizens. The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago guarantees human rights and freedom to all its citizens, without discrimination based on race, origin, colour, religion or sex. The right to life, liberty, security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof, except by due process of law, are guaranteed by the Constitution. Also guaranteed are the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression and freedom of the press. An independent judiciary is ever vigilant to ensure that these rights are not abrogated or infringed.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is fully cognizant of its duty to protect the security and well-being of its citizens, including the innocent, the victims of violence and the vulnerable. Their rights have also been guaranteed by the Constitution. We do not subscribe to the current trend that subordinates the rights of these citizens to those of the perpetrators of violent crimes against them. We are of the view that our innocent citizens also deserve the Government's protection of their basic rights to life and security of the person.

We cannot speak of development without focusing specific attention on the problems of social development, poverty eradication and sustainable economic development. The international community must, now more than ever, jointly seek to ensure both the economic well-being and the social development of all its peoples. In this regard, the United Nations has made tremendous strides in its efforts to confront the problems of development and to improve the quality of life of humankind. We are aware that, to this end, a number of tools have been devised to enable the international community to build a consensus in the social and economic fields.

It is of special significance to Trinidad and Tobago that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/161 of 22 December 1995, a special session of the General Assembly will be convened in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and to consider further actions and initiatives.

The 10 commitments undertaken at the World Summit in Copenhagen constitute strong imperatives by Member States and the international community to achieve social development with the well-being of individuals in the society at the core. One of the commitments given priority attention at the Copenhagen Summit was the eradication of poverty. However, poverty levels remain alarmingly high, and more practical initiatives towards eradicating poverty are essential. We are pleased that the General Assembly has identified this as a priority issue and has dedicated the period 1997-2006 as the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty in order to achieve the goal of eradicating absolute poverty and reducing overall poverty substantially in the world.

The effect of globalization and its impact on social development must be carefully studied. The United Nations and its relevant bodies will be a useful forum for this discourse.

Trinidad and Tobago sees these as some of the issues which the Preparatory Committee for the special session should consider when it convenes its substantive sessions in May 1999 and April 2000 to ensure that the special session will be meaningful.

In September 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, firm commitments were undertaken to improve the status of women by adopting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Follow-up activities are under way and should continue apace vigorously to ensure that the mandates of the Beijing Conference are fully implemented. An area which requires special focus is the enhancement of women's involvement in the development process. We welcome the decision taken by the General Assembly in December 1997 to convene in the year 2000 a high-level plenary review to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to consider further action and initiatives.

Trinidad and Tobago attaches great significance to the rights of children. We are committed to ensuring that they are neither disadvantaged nor deprived in any fashion of the means necessary for their wholesome development and their full integration into society. Since the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Trinidad and Tobago has taken a number of measures to promote and pursue the mandates of the Convention. Steps have also been taken to achieve national awareness in this area, including the elaboration of a national Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, the promotion of the rights of children through school and community outreach programmes and the establishment of a Child Registry for monitoring children in need of special protection. Measures are also being undertaken with respect to the harmonization and codification of all laws relating to children, as well as the establishment of a Family Court.

We are on a swift march towards the new millennium. Let us, as a community of nations, renew our resolve to work towards the achievement of the goals we have set for ourselves: goals of peace, security, justice and development for all. Political will and commitment are necessary for this process, as is a genuine appreciation of the realities faced by each individual member of the international community in the pursuit of these goals.

We, the Member States of the United Nations, must not lose sight of the interdependence of development and the attainment of these ideals. As we formulate new policies in our strategy for the improvement of all aspects of the lives of humankind, and as we invent new modalities for their implementation, we are encouraged by the many successes we have had, especially in recent years.

Trinidad and Tobago pledges to continue to work assiduously in its efforts to establish the foundations for a peaceful, secure and just world. This is the only legacy we must leave to future generations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali and for Malians living abroad, His Excellency Mr. Modibo Sidibe.

Mr. Sidibe (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me first of all, on behalf of the delegation of Mali, to extend to Mr. Didier Opertti my very warm congratulations on his outstanding election to guide the work of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. To ensure the success of the lofty mission entrusted to him, I wish to assure him that he will have the full and open cooperation of my country's delegation. I would also like to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, for the skill and ability with which he guided our work at a time when the reform of the United Nations occupied a prominent place on the agenda of our Organization.

I also take this opportunity to convey to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his team all our gratitude for their tireless commitment in the service of the ideals of the United Nations. The delegation of Mali fully appreciates his programme of reforms designed to adapt our Organization to the changing realities of the world.

The fifty-third session of the General Assembly has opened at a time when the growing impoverishment of the poorest countries, the resurgence of hotbeds of tension and the difficulties incumbent in a stronger and more united cooperation are demonstrating that the rhythm of international change is unprecedented and requires our Organization's attention.

Indeed, it would now appear that increased interdependence and the globalization of the economy are contributing heavily to the rise of new tensions and creating profound imbalances for the developing countries. The entire world, under the yoke of the logic of extreme competition, is going through a phase of profound confusion. Everywhere, North and South, workers live under the remorseless threat of market rules, which grow murkier and more pitiless every day. Financial crises are likely to undermine the developing countries' efforts at economic reform.

The imbalance between North and South is being exacerbated, the gaps are widening and differences becoming entrenched. Characterized by a disparity in income, access to services and the possibility of living in dignity, poverty is growing in the developing countries and even spreading within the developed world.

My delegation certainly believes that, if genuine social development and poverty reduction are to be achieved, strong economic growth is necessary and that the poorest countries must have access to markets in order to better participate, on a sustainable basis, in the world economy. In this respect, we welcome the Secretary-General's suggestion that the developing countries be encouraged to participate more actively in the drafting of new international standards and in ensuring that these standards be transparent. Specifically, non-tariff barriers should be eliminated for African and the least developed countries; vigorous measures should be adopted to ease the debt burden, whether by converting the public debt of the poorest countries into grants or by easing access to the Debt Initiative for the heavily indebted poor countries.

But let us make no mistake: what is truly at stake today is a globalization focused on sustainable human development. The challenge at the end of this century and into the twenty-first will be to close the gap between North and South.

In this respect, as the highest authorities have said; we are convinced that the history of humanity is the history of men. Our constant quest for man is our roadmap for the world's progress. Our struggle will always be against a blind global market and in favour of sharing and solidarity. Let us have economic growth, by all means, but let our work and its fruit be shared so as to end these inequalities. Let us not close our eyes: Where there is injustice and iniquity, there is no peace.

Respect for human and national rights is an integral factor for economic prosperity and social equity, as well as for promoting and maintaining peace and security. We can achieve such respect and right such imbalances if, through a renewed political dialogue undertaken in all responsibility and candour, we tackle the challenges with global vision and solidarity, in the conviction of true partnership and shared and equal responsibility in the building of a better world, a world of humanity.

In this context, the major challenge facing the Government of Mali today is achieving sustainable human development through the struggle against poverty. This development hinges on a strengthened process of democratization, the rule of law and the implementation of decentralization, the vehicle for local development, designed and guided by the people.

Mali is rigorously pursuing a freely agreed policy of economic reform and entrenching its democracy. The positive results of these efforts, though fragile, are very encouraging, but there remain problems and difficulties which our programmes — howsoever participatory — will require major outside assistance, peace and stability in our subregion, Africa and the world to solve. The same holds true for many countries, especially in Africa, which, through the courageous reforms they have undertaken, are once again on the road to economic growth.

Like them, we intend to continue and consolidate our economic reforms with strong growth aimed at poverty reduction. The international community, however, must reverse the trend towards decreased official development assistance, which is essential to our basic minimum needs. We pay tribute to the tireless efforts of the United Nations system and our development partners and urge an increase in official development

assistance, without which we will scarcely enjoy the benefits of our reforms, undertaken with so much sacrifice in the fight against poverty.

We also need a partnership aimed at strengthening our economic capacities to convert and market our commodities, facilitating their access to markets, promoting the resurgence of our private sectors and increasing flows of direct foreign investments. All this must take place in a more favourable economic environment if unemployment and poverty are to be consistently reduced.

The end of the cold war transformed the international context for United Nations missions and activities. In the sphere of international peace and security, our Organization is now taken up with domestic conflicts that often have serious international repercussions. Unfortunately, in many cases, recent events allow us to assume that this type of conflict will continue to claim our attention.

Now that certain guiding principles in the area of peace and security are widely accepted, it is quite obvious that peacekeeping will remain our priority objective. It is therefore essential that we improve our preventive system and strengthen our institution's capacity to organize and lead these operations efficiently and successfully.

For its part, Mali will always fight for more peace, justice and solidarity throughout the world. For us, security and development are indissoluble. The grave crises shaking the world, and Africa in particular, strengthen our conviction that the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the subregional organizations must cooperate closely with one another in the search for effective early warning, conflict prevention and management, and peacekeeping mechanisms. In this framework, and with particular reference to Africa, the prevention of conflicts and disarmament are of great concern.

Given all of the challenges of democracy, development and security that Africa must meet, President Alpha Oumar Konaré of the Republic of Mali said a few weeks ago that:

> "The development of the continent must be managed on new terms. The difficult situation of our continent has arisen almost everywhere as a result of democratic failures, which we must redress in our young and fragile democracies by an essential democratic commitment. We must promote pluralistic expression, the transfer of power and dialogue founded on law. We must eschew violence.
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> "The future of our continent does not lie in the emergence of ethnic republics, which will only lead us into general anarchy. It is important, we feel, not to deny, much less crush expressions of autonomy. They must be managed politically in a democratic context of the basic transfer of power and the emergence of local power with a view towards regional integration.
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> "Thirty-eight years after the independence won in 1960, there is no question of redrawing the borders inherited from colonialism, but nothing today can justify border conflicts. We must be able to settle all border disputes politically. It is essential today that any ill-defined border be corrected in serenity, not in the heat of tension. The OAU's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution should be able to speed that forward.
>
> "At a time when everyone is welcoming integration, borders must have a different meaning. They must be managed as border countries, joint areas and shared space."

President Konaré also said that:

> "Post-election periods are also increasingly becoming times of conflict. This must be prevented by the proper preparation for elections, because some recent incidents of electoral challenge have threatened democracy. People must know that the only access to power is through the ballot box, whence all legitimacy flows. Everyone must participate.
>
> "We must therefore seek to control electoral challenges without ever endangering pluralistic expression and the transfer of power. Strength must always reside in law and right — the whole law and right and nothing but law and right — and oppose any impulse to disorder and violence."

In the view of the President of the Republic of Mali,

> "Africa can no longer be managed as it has been since 1960. A new Africa is on the move, an Africa which wishes to define its future and take responsibility for its own development; which is searching for solidarity, not alms; which is

responsible and confident. It is an Africa once and for all on its own feet, a democratic Africa."

That Africa more than ever needs security and peace. To have that security and peace, Africa must, like the rest of the world, be free from weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons, particularly light weapons.

With regard to disarmament, Mali hails the decisions of the Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in particular on the Treaty's permanent extension. We also hail the entry into force on 29 April 1997 of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the progress in negotiations regarding the Biological Weapons Convention. We warmly welcome the coming entry into force of the Convention on anti-personnel landmines. Mali, which ratified this Convention early on, began last May destroying its stocks, which Mali's army had never used.

While welcoming also the notable progress made on instruments regarding weapons of mass destruction, Mali is deeply concerned about conventional weapons, which remain an area so far unexplored and not subject to international norms. Recent conflicts, particularly in Africa, which have claimed so many human lives, are fuelled not by weapons of mass destruction, but by light weapons. That is why my country, together with the United Nations and the countries of the West African subregion, has undertaken specific initiatives to counter this phenomenon.

We are pleased by the welcome given to President Konaré's initiative regarding the moratorium on the import, export and production of light weapons by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and more recently by the Organization of African Unity during the Ouagadougou summit and by the Non-Aligned Movement at the Durban summit. But it is important now to go further to reduce and contain the threat of the proliferation of light weapons. This moratorium is in essence a confidence-building measure, aiming over the long term to strengthen the ability of the Governments involved to exert stricter control over the illegal traffic in light weapons.

Here we wish to pay tribute to the far-sightedness and responsible commitment of the ECOWAS countries, which plan to announce a moratorium soon. This will be a precedent demonstrating Africa's clear will to prevent conflicts by exerting pressure on the means which incite and fuel them. The international community must keep up the momentum by mobilizing around the issue of light weapons, supporting the moratorium and making it effective by implementing a programme of coordination and assistance for security and development, which underpin the moratorium and help to widen it.

We are an active party, and we support the proposals that emerge daily for tracking the illegal traffic in light weapons and establishing a control mechanism. Although it is a complex and difficult matter, we must work together energetically to perfect such a mechanism.

There must be more support for resolution 52/38 C, regarding assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them, and States must demand more on this issue of the international community and the United Nations, which we congratulate on the action already taken. We must show our commitment to make vigorous progress in creating a mechanism to curb this matter and, at the same time, actively support initiatives such as the moratorium, consciousness-raising and the mobilization of all State and non-State actors to better ensure peace and reduce the threat posed by this illegal proliferation to people, particularly women and children, and to States and democracy.

On behalf of the delegation of Mali, I would like once again to voice our solidarity with and compassion for all the peoples of the world who are still living in conflict situations.

Regarding the Middle East, we are deeply concerned over the deadlock in the peace process and the policy of fait accompli aimed at changing the religious, civil and historic character of the Holy City of Al-Quds. The agreements concluded on the basis of "land for peace" must be implemented. We reaffirm our unswerving support for the just struggle of the fraternal Palestinian people to realize their legitimate right to self-determination and to establish an independent State.

We remain convinced that in Angola scrupulous respect for the Lusaka Protocol is the only path to lasting peace and reconciliation. I wish once again to honour the memory of Maître Alioune Blondin Beye, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the seven members of his team who tragically perished on the road to peace in Angola.

We have continually voiced our grave concern about the suffering of the fraternal people of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as a result of the embargo imposed on it. While noting recent events, we should like to recall the

decision taken by the heads of State or Government of the OAU at their recent summit and to reaffirm that the time has come to end the suffering of the fraternal Libyan people by lifting the embargo and finding a lasting solution.

Concerned about acts of terrorism, which we condemn in all its forms, Mali firmly condemned the lethal attacks against diplomatic missions of the United States in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi. We reiterate our condolences to the families of the victims and call for greater international cooperation to prevent and combat this threat. We also call for the convening of an international conference on terrorism under the aegis of the United Nations, whose exclusive competence in the area of international peace and security we need increasingly to reaffirm.

I would like to conclude on the issue of the expansion of the Security Council. Clearly this body, which was conceived in a context quite different from today's, cannot be left untouched in the course of reform. My delegation endorses the demands of Africa for democratization and an equitable distribution of the two categories of seats, permanent and non-permanent, with all the prerogatives and powers that go with them.

We are convinced that a restructured United Nations, democratic and given essential powers, can help ensure a more orderly management of world affairs by eliminating the injustices, disparities and selfishness which threaten mankind, so that nations can finally, in a spirit of solidarity, devote their resources and their energy to the progress and development of mankind.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Miguel Oyono Ndong Mifumu, on whom I now call.

Mr. Oyono Ndong Mifumu (Equatorial Guinea) (*interpretation from Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express to Mr. Didier Opertti the sincere congratulations of the delegation of Equatorial Guinea on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine and to express my appreciation for the enormous amount of work he accomplished as President at the last session.

May I also reiterate to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, our brother Kofi Annan, my country's support for the efforts he is making to find viable solutions to conflicts in various parts of the world, and particularly in Africa. I would like to encourage him to continue with the reforms he has undertaken to adapt and restructure the United Nations.

Once again, we are gathered here to consider and reflect on the great challenges humanity is confronting and will have to continue to confront at the threshold of the new millennium. Every year in this same forum we see that the same causes produce the same effects, but solutions are slow to arrive. The fact is that we are all victims of our own contradictions.

From this rostrum, we have been repeating for the past 50 years that humankind wants no more wars, that it wants a lasting peace. Nevertheless, the large industrial complexes continue to produce more weapons that are increasingly sophisticated and deadly.

We are assured that the priority at the end of the century is the fight against poverty and the underdevelopment of nations in the framework of the globalization of our economies. Yet the problems of hunger, malnutrition, disease and unemployment are assuming alarming proportions, and in many cases the growth of these problems is even more apparent than in the past. In the meantime, the peoples of the world continue to wait, and their future is filled with uncertainty.

Let us be honest: disarmament is possible only if the large weapons-producing complexes are dismantled. To claim the contrary is pure contradiction. Disarmament requires the same approach as the fight against drugs — in other words, the destruction of the centres of production, distribution and sale. There is no need for me to elaborate on this issue, since the solution is in the hands of those who benefit from this illicit trade.

However, I do wish to refer to two questions that are the subject of debate at this session of the General Assembly: the phenomenon of globalization and the fight against terrorism.

In connection with the former, we have serious doubts and questions regarding the sincerity of this dialogue among nations. On the one hand, we have those who offer many pretexts for continuing to obstruct free trade, the free circulation of goods and persons and the

transfer of technology, and who erect other barriers that prevent the developing countries from achieving sustainable economic growth.

As for the African continent, we all know that the Uruguay Round is an instrument for marginalizing the developing countries, nor are we unaware that the payment of foreign debt remains a means of exporting capital precisely to those who do not need it. Under these circumstances, how can we devise an agenda for the globalization of economic relations between the developed North and the developing South, in a framework of fairness?

Globalization must begin with fair prices for our raw materials. The immense opportunities and advantages offered to the world markets by the developing countries of Africa must be put to use in the context of a sincere partnership between North and South. No one has chosen marginalization. The question is, should it be forced on us?

Some detractors of the African continent apply simplistic reasoning when they categorically state that the principle causes of poverty and marginalization in Africa are political in nature: poor governance, corruption and armed conflict.

Without trying to discard these arguments, we believe that they do not justify the unfair treatment of our raw materials in the most profitable markets of the North. Nor do we believe that the marginalization now suffered by the African continent is an inevitable phenomenon. A great deal is being done to inscribe our countries in the current agenda of globalization. The ongoing processes of subregional and regional integration are evidence of the political will that today infuses African leaders.

We wonder about the degree of sincerity and transparency in the dialogue aimed at facilitating the full integration of the African economies into the mechanisms for globalization of trade and into technological advances. As for globalization, it should mean that everyone sells what he has and wherever he wishes, without the customs, administrative and tariff barriers that today prevent the free access of the products of the South to the markets of the North.

Furthermore, the ever present issue of foreign debt remains an obstacle to economic growth in many developing countries.

My country, Equatorial Guinea, sincerely believes that this situation is not fortuitous, and far less is it due to a lack of potential or a lack of opportunity. What we call for is not simply assistance. We want our own efforts to be valued; we want use to be made of the various opportunities we can offer to the world of globalization that lies ahead.

Nevertheless, all of this also requires the peace and socio-political stability of nations. Unfortunately, it would seem that everything is being done to create instability in our countries. Today, we are seriously threatened from outside and within our borders by terrorism and mercenary actions carried out by individuals or groups blinded by hunger for power, ethnic hatred, racism and the desire for hegemony.

For the first time in its history, my country has experienced, in the course of the past 18 months, two acts of armed destabilization. One was on 17 May 1997, when a ship carrying arms and mercenaries was detained by the Angolan police in its territorial waters. The other was on 21 January of this year, when a group of individuals attacked a number of towns in my country and murdered six persons in cold blood.

What justification can there be for terrorist actions such as those perpetrated against the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania? What justification can there be for a band of terrorists who murder peaceful citizens in cold blood? What political claims can justify the murder and mutilation of another human being, as occurred in my country?

On this question, some countries present here are acting with a double standard; depending on their own interests, terrorist actions are justifiable or not. When these actions take place within a developing country, some powerful communications media invoke, among other such fallacies, the "struggle for the freedom of peoples" to do away with regimes that, according to them, are dictatorial. But when similar actions of the same type take place in any country of the North, then the story changes, and those responsible for such actions are called terrorists and enemies of society.

That double standard was evident when such actions received the support and solidarity of certain Spanish political groups and elements of the Spanish communications media. Only the Government of that country condemned those acts. On the other hand, a lobby was formed from among several political parties —

the Basque Nationalist Party, the United Left and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party — each of which published communiqués expressing their solidarity with the perpetrators of those terrorist acts. Since then, those same groups have been trying to fabricate an ethnic problem in my country. They have promoted a number of resolutions against my country in various international forums, including in recent meetings of the European Parliament and the Joint Assembly of the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, in a clear attempt to justify the terrorist acts in question.

My Government, however, faithful to its commitment to establish a State based on the rule of law in Equatorial Guinea, held a public trial, with procedural guarantees and international observers. Furthermore, the 15 death sentences imposed on the main perpetrators of those crimes have been commuted by the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, in an effort to preserve the social unity of the nation. But it seems that such measures still do not satisfy the political circles that are persisting in their attempts to destabilize the peaceful people of Equatorial Guinea.

Nevertheless, I would like to assure the Assembly that, thanks to the maturity of the people of Equatorial Guinea and because of their peaceful spirit and openness to dialogue and democratic debate, we have been free from the serious upheavals experienced by some countries and regions of our continent as a result of such actions.

The internal realities of Equatorial Guinea therefore bear no relation to the systematic campaign of hounding and harassment that has been waged against it for several years. Peace and stability prevail, investments are flowing in and there are real signs of growth. The political reforms are irreversible, our State of law is being strengthened and the better governance of the country is being promoted. To that end, the Government of Equatorial Guinea has relations of cooperation with several international organizations and friendly countries for the establishment of technical assistance programmes in the fields of economics, democracy, human rights and governance. We are continuing to cooperate with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and our cooperation with the international financial institutions is positive in the areas to which I have referred.

We are clearly living during a time of promise and rebirth in our country. We appeal here to the international community to show its solidarity by supporting our efforts to consolidate the democratic process and the implementation of the plan for the socio-economic development of the country, outlined by the national economic conference, which took place in Bata from 8 to 14 September 1997.

With regard to the African continent, we urge the international community to find mechanisms geared to achieving a ceasefire and ending the hostilities in the Great Lakes region and to restoring peace and order in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Eritrea and Ethiopia. To that end, we wish to reaffirm here the recommendations contained in the Bata declaration for the promotion of democracy, peace and sustainable development in Africa, which was adopted by the subregional conference on democratic institutions and peace in Central Africa, held from 18 to 21 May 1998 under the auspices of the United Nations, at which the President of Equatorial Guinea recommended the creation of a subregional parliament to deal with issues so as to guarantee peace and security in the subregion. Equatorial Guinea pledges to make its contribution to the attainment of that objective.

Finally, my country reaffirms its support for the necessary reform of the Security Council. With regard to the increase of its membership, we are in favour of equitable distribution so that our Organization will be able faithfully to reflect the geopolitical realities of today's world. In this context, Equatorial Guinea associates itself with the position, adopted at the twelfth summit of the non-aligned countries held a month ago in Durban, South Africa, that Africa should have two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats, in the interests of the credibility and democratization of the United Nations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar, Her Excellency Mrs. Lila Hanitra Ratsifandrihamanana, on whom I now call.

Mrs. Ratsifandrihamanana (Madagascar) (*interpretation from French*): The General Assembly has unanimously chosen Mr. Opertti to direct the work of its fifty-third session. Echoing previous speakers, I should like to congratulate him, as I consider his election a tribute to his personal qualities as a diplomat and a statesman. Through me, Madagascar is pleased to express its best wishes for the success of his mission.

His predecessor, whose competence we valued, was able to rely on our cooperation throughout his term of

office; and Mr. Opertti may also be assured of our complete support in his efforts to accomplish his task successfully.

Madagascar reiterates its encouragement and support to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, in his quest for ways and means to make our Organization increasingly dynamic.

The great family of the United Nations is meeting once again, as it does every year, to reflect collectively on the situation in the world so as to lay the foundations for a better existence, one which is safer and more equitable, in spite of all our differences and divergences.

Madagascar reaffirms its support for the United Nations though its presence every year at this annual gathering. For us, this forum for exchanging views represents the first, universal bastion against injustice and violence in the world, and it is the best tool for safeguarding peace and security and for the promotion of progress.

In the light of the statements made here, globalization undoubtedly constitutes the backdrop for our many concerns at this end of the century. With all its advantages, disadvantages and disappointments, and transcending the limits of the economic framework, globalization is today expressing itself in terms of insecurity.

Insecurity is spreading virtually everywhere, in many forms and manifestations. Insecurity is being globalized, and whenever a man dies — whether it be in a war, or as a bombing victim, or in a cold-blooded massacre, or simply in his sickbed — somewhere children cry, women suffer by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the millions. And death is more than ever part of our daily lives. This is why today we are focusing our attention on the problems of insecurity and on the need to rally our efforts for the maintenance of peace.

The international community is now confronting situations that jeopardize peace and security and that threaten the sustainable development of nations. In many parts of the world, civil wars, inter-State conflicts, border disputes, and ethnic, tribal and religious confrontations resurface, bringing suffering, poverty, political instability and marginalization, be it in Kosovo, the Comoros, the Great Lakes region or elsewhere.

Added to this is the persistence of new threats, such as international terrorism, organized crime, corruption, the proliferation of narcotic drugs and the deterioration of the environment. Access to weapons of mass destruction is becoming easier and easier. The proliferation of the light-weapons industry and the widespread use of those weapons are becoming a major scourge for most countries.

Insecurity is economic as well as social. In the era of technological progress and of the spectacular growth in world food production, whole regions are experiencing famine and malnutrition. One quarter of the world's population is still living in poverty. Millions of children under the age of five continue to die of diseases, and major sectors of society are cut off from education and from basic health care. About 180 million children under the age of 14 are obliged to work; the less fortunate have no alternative except sexual exploitation, and for many young people unemployment is the only prospect for the future. Similarly, a large number of women cannot to this very day exercise their fundamental rights. Many remain victims of domestic violence, social injustice, deliberate massacres or armed conflict.

Moreover, the financial upheaval that has afflicted South-East Asia, Latin America and Russia has shaken the international economic system. It is true that global information networks have reduced both distances and time, but at the same time they have contributed to increasing scientific, cultural and moral insecurity. Computer viruses have become as dangerous as nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. All of this illustrates the magnitude and the drawbacks of globalization, as well as the scope of the interdependence of States.

Fifty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the rights and freedoms inherent in the dignity and worth of the human person are still often violated, and we witness the burgeoning of new challenges — challenges that are ever different and that require well-adapted and better-planned strategies. It is obvious that no State in the world can guarantee each of its citizens material and spiritual well-being in conditions of peace and full respect for the most basic rights and freedoms.

While in the recent past — and more specifically in 1985, from this same rostrum — emphasis was placed on the balance of forces, in general, and on nuclear parity, in particular, everyone today unanimously recognizes that security cannot exist without cooperation and solidarity, which implies spectacular changes in international relations. Evidence of this recognition is the forthcoming

entry into force, on 1 March 1999, of the international Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, as well as the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

For its part, Madagascar, which has never deviated from its commitment to disarmament and which is, in this respect, a signatory of a number of international Conventions, is gratified at the prospects of the negotiation of a cut-off treaty on fissile material for military purposes in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

We also welcome the call for the holding in the near future of an international conference on the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, a call made by the heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries who met recently in Durban. Along the same lines, Madagascar of course associates itself with the proposal made by President Blaise Compaoré, the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), concerning the convening in the year 2000 of a summit conference under the auspices of the United Nations with a view to the formulation by the international community of a joint response to the problem of terrorism.

Like other States, on 18 July, in Rome, Madagascar signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the Final Act of the Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries.

It would be appropriate to consider the question of security through a multidimensional approach encompassing military, economic and social aspects at various levels — international, regional and national.

Poverty and the persistence of imbalances that divide the world into developed countries, developing countries, least developed countries, poor and indebted countries, are factors contributing to tension and obstacles to the establishment of a genuine and lasting peace. This, in any event, is the reality in Africa, my continent.

The Cairo Declaration of 1993 established the primary objective of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Africa. Nonetheless, without the active support of the international community, these actions would remain ineffective. Security Council resolution 1170 (1998), on the holding of regular ministerial meetings in order to evaluate actions undertaken for peace in Africa, should therefore be welcomed. For Madagascar, it is a question of confirming the will to coordinate actions of the United Nations with the pan-African organization and with regional mechanisms.

While awaiting an appropriate mobilization of the resources needed for the effective implementation of actions in the framework of the Agenda for Development, it seems to us vital that the developing countries make their contribution by proposing the establishment of a mechanism to help them attain their shared aspirations and affirm their solidarity.

It is in this spirit that the Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, meeting at Durban, considered a proposal to establish, within the Non-Aligned Movement, a mechanism consisting of three funds financed by our own resources, up to perhaps 0.1 per cent of gross national product or a percentage of export income. The funds thus obtained would be capitalized through investment in international financial markets.

For Madagascar, this mechanism would help integrate the activities of developing countries into the process of financial globalization and would help resolve, at least in part, their financial and debt problems, in tandem with the actions undertaken by the international community and the financial institutions. A large number of speakers during that session recommended an evaluation of the capacity of the Bretton Woods institutions to adapt to current realities. The three-fund mechanism could be among the basic documents for joint reflection on a new global financial architecture.

In implementing the resolutions of the international community, it is a key responsibility of each country to create a climate conducive to lasting peace and economic growth. Among the elements of this responsibility are the establishment of regulations that are in keeping with agreed aspirations, good governance, the creation of adequate systems for follow-up and monitoring, and respect for the rules of democracy. In the present context of global economic liberalization, every development actor has its own role to play, including the State as the protector of the fundamental rights of its people and of its sovereignty and as a catalyst for development programmes.

Madagascar, whose Constitution and national laws are based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, endorses those values. In that connection, we are engaged in the process of democratization, good

governance and the rule of law, along with economic and structural reforms, to lead our country towards credible partnership in the international system. Our authorities are now committed to implementing recovery programmes aimed at stepping up the struggle against poverty and at creating a climate conducive to the complete fulfilment of the citizen.

The institutional aspects of this programme include the establishment of autonomous provinces and of institutions provided for in the Constitution, and the continued reform of the civil service and the judiciary system.

In the economic sphere, the State is continuing to pull out of the production sector, and will be doing all in its power to create an environment of vigour and competition and to put financial administration on a sound footing through the creation of bodies to regulate sector-based activities.

Finally, in the social area, public expenditures will reflect our priorities: education, health and safety, and security. We are devoting special attention to programmes to make the most disadvantaged segments of the population aware of their own responsibilities.

Although the implementation of this programme depends first and foremost on Madagascar's own efforts, it is obvious that there are limits on our resources for guaranteeing a better quality of life for our citizens and thus for protecting their rights. The strengthening of international partnership should therefore be viewed not only from the financial but also from the scientific and technological standpoints, so that all countries may hope for an equal chance of success. Of that I am convinced.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Haile Weldensae, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea.

Mr. Weldensae (Eritrea): I wish to join those who have spoken before me in congratulating Mr. Didier Opertti on his election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. His vast experience and skill assure us that he will guide the deliberations of the Assembly to a successful end. I assure him of the full support of my delegation as he carries out his important mandate.

Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for his outstanding leadership during his tenure last session.

The Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, deserves appreciation for his commendable efforts and for the effective leadership he has provided to ensure the realization of the ideals of our Organization by making the United Nations more effective and better able to serve its Members.

The end of the cold war, even if only briefly, raised hopes and expectations and sent tidings of a more peaceful, safer, just and fair world safeguarded from conflict and tension, hunger and disease. Such hopes and expectations were to be frustrated rather early as the world was plunged in numerous conflicts between and with States, ethnic violence and hatred, terrorism, gross violations of human rights, racism and xenophobia, as well as mass starvation and an increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons.

The international community cannot dismiss or, much less, ignore this situation, which in some cases has caused the commission of serious international crimes, not only because it is generally the innocent and the weak — women, children and the elderly — who are the first victims, but also because this situation, which now seems to be limited to certain regions, may soon engulf wider areas of the world. In the face of these harsh realities, it is incumbent on the United Nations and the international community to search for fresh, innovative approaches with a view to eliminating the root causes of this situation, in order to ensure respect for the basic principles of the Charter, to save the innocent from the scourge of terrorism and to protect the human and civil rights of ethnic minorities. If they fail to do so, it will not only prolong the agony of the victims but will, in fact, sooner or later, threaten regional as well as international peace and security.

The founding fathers of our Organization recognized economic development as one of humanity's inalienable rights, and set as one of the goals of the United Nations the promotion of social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. I am certain that all developing countries would declare in no uncertain terms that this goal has so far been unattained.

The situation in Africa is cause for serious concern. In spite of the great efforts exerted by regional and subregional organizations and agencies, the situation in many parts of the continent is deteriorating and becoming

more dangerous by the day. The tragic bloodshed and suffering that Africans have witnessed in the recent past in various parts of the continent are too horrible to recite. They must not recur and, where they continue to exist, they must be stopped.

In the Great Lakes region, conflicts are developing much wider ramifications, in spite of their seeming regional containment. They pose a grave threat to peace and security, as they may soon involve extraregional Powers. It is hoped that through ongoing regional initiatives it will be possible to formulate just and mutually acceptable solutions. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africans and the rest of the world have been forced to witness the disheartening spectacle of an African country which had barely emerged from the cruel destruction of a rapacious dictatorship being once again ravaged by multifaceted fighting. This has also divided the broad African coalition which had contributed to the promotion of peace and security in that country. This sad state of affairs must be quickly reversed on the basis of full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and a recognition that the internal political process is the sole prerogative of the Congolese people, and with awareness of the need for a regional framework of cooperation to address the security concerns of the countries of the region.

Somalia and the Sudan continue to be sources of anguish and sorrow for Africa, because there is still a lack of progress in the efforts to resolve the crises in both countries. The frustration of the international community at the lack of progress in peacemaking in both countries is understandable. It must be noted, however, that genuine efforts continue to be made by the countries of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the international community must not despair or give up, but must contribute to the efforts of these countries if they are to be successful. In this connection, my delegation upholds the view that with regard to the Sudan conflict IGAD's Declaration of Principles and consequent resolutions remain the sound basis for a just and lasting solution to the conflict.

In my statement last year I declared that Eritrea's foreign policy rested on two basic tenets. The first was the deep conviction that where there is goodwill all disputes can be resolved through peaceful negotiations and methods without recourse to violence. The second tenet was the unswerving devotion of Eritrea to justice and equality. I also declared that these two tenets have influenced our search for friendship and cooperation with our neighbours, as well as with other States. This statement is as valid today as it was last year.

The commitment of the Government of Eritrea to these two tenets has helped to defuse conflict with the Republic of Yemen and to arrive at a mutual understanding to resolve the dispute over the Eritrean archipelago of Hanish-Zukar in the Red Sea by peaceful means through arbitration.

Today, too, the Government of Eritrea insists that the road to peace with Ethiopia is by a strict application and enforcement of the principles of the Charters of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), as well as the OAU decision on colonial borders. Once again, Eritrea calls upon the international community, particularly the United Nations and the OAU, to ensure respect for these principles and the decision.

Eritrea was surprised and disturbed by the eruption of conflict with Ethiopia because, in spite of disagreements on the issue of boundaries, dating back to the days of armed struggle the Eritrean Government had assumed and hoped that in view of the close relations between the two countries, it was possible to arrive at an amicable and enduring solution.

The responsibility for the escalation of the dispute rests solely with the Government of Ethiopia, which has for a long period of time consistently violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea, resulting in the occupation of large tracts of Eritrean territory, followed by the forced displacement of Eritrean peasants and the replacement of Eritrean administrative structures by Ethiopian institutions. It reached a climax on 6 May only as a result of the further unprovoked incursions by members of the Ethiopian armed forces, which attacked Eritrean troops in the Badme region, in south-western Eritrea. These incursions were premeditated and meticulously planned. This is the root cause of the dispute.

For a long time Eritreans had opted for patient and quiet diplomacy. They had hoped against hope that the periodic incursions were only the petty acts of some miscreant and ill-advised regional officials. It was only at a very late stage — and particularly after the publication in 1997 of an official map of the Tigray administrative zone incorporating additional indisputably Eritrean territory and after the issuance of the new Ethiopian currency note depicting the same map — that they

realized the full meaning of the Ethiopian adventure. Yet, even in the aftermath of the fighting that was triggered by the unprovoked Ethiopian incursion and attacks on Eritrean troops, Eritrea never crossed its internationally recognized border; but Ethiopia still controls other Eritrean territory in south-western Eritrea.

In spite of all this evidence of its aggressive deeds, the Ethiopian Government is conducting an absurd propaganda campaign to portray Eritrea as a warmongering nation which has committed aggression against, and occupies, Ethiopian territory. Nothing could be further from the truth. At no time have Eritrean troops crossed Eritrea's internationally recognized borders as everybody can see. On the contrary, it was Ethiopian troops that invaded Eritrea after Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's declaration of war on 13 May 1998. They were repulsed. It is important to note that the Deputy Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Tekeda Alemu, had articulated Ethiopia's expansionist designs by publicly declaring in a speech to members of the Ethiopian community in the United States that Ethiopia would occupy the Eritrean port of Assab within a short time. In the light of the above, Ethiopia's claims that it is the victim of aggression and will not negotiate unless Eritrea withdraws from "its territory" are obviously false and only meant to hoodwink the international community and to cover up its own acts of aggression.

Even today, Ethiopia is threatening war unless Eritrea withdraws unconditionally from territories which are fully within its internationally recognized borders. Today virtually the whole of the Ethiopian army has taken positions along the Eritrean border, and almost all of the highest leaders of Ethiopia, including the President, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the President of the Tigray region and a Senior Official of the TPLF have publicly declared in just the past few days that Ethiopia has finalized war preparations and will soon teach Eritreans lessons they will never forget.

It is regrettable, therefore, that all the goodwill and efforts of the Eritrean Government, consisting of several constructive proposals, to bring about a peaceful and legal settlement of the present border dispute with Ethiopia, on the basis of the OAU resolution on colonial borders, have been consistently rejected by the Ethiopian Government, which obdurately pursues a policy which is committed to the settlement of matters by military means. The Ethiopian Government has also rejected all overtures by third parties for a peaceful solution of the dispute and all calls made by the international community to seek a peaceful solution.

This expansionist and aggressive policy is underscored by the use or threat of force, as well as a massive and malicious propaganda campaign against Eritrea. The propaganda campaign accents ethnic hatred and vituperation against and slander of the Eritrean people and members of the Eritrean Government. It also calls upon the Eritrean people to rise up against their Government.

At the same time, the Ethiopian Government has been systematically and wilfully violating the most sacred and cherished provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the two International Covenants and several other international human rights instruments, as well as the principles enshrined in the United Nations and OAU Charters, by deporting or expelling more than 20,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin under extremely unhealthy conditions or dumping them in very dangerous places, and by deliberately separating family members, exposing them to inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment and confiscating their property. These acts have been well documented by third parties, including members of United Nations agencies, heads of mission of member States of the European Union and several non-governmental organizations.

Yet the Ethiopian Government, in an amazingly refined application of the Orwellian principle, accuses the Eritrean Government of precisely the outrages and atrocities it itself has been committing against Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin. The truth is that the Eritrean Government has not detained, expelled, deported or otherwise violated the rights — human or otherwise — of Ethiopians living in Eritrea. This has been verified by legitimate third parties like representatives of the European Union, United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As usual, the Ethiopian Government has called all of them liars. We have hitherto extended an invitation to all interested parties to carry out an on-the-spot verification of the human rights conditions in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. We now extend this invitation to members of the Assembly. We also would like them to receive a similar invitation from the Ethiopian Government.

This dispute is about borders, pure and simple. Any effort to transmute it into anything else must be viewed as only a vain and brazen attempt by the Ethiopian Government to camouflage its aggression and its

expansionist policies. In this connection, it must be made clear that it was the Ethiopian Government which wilfully violated Eritrea's colonial boundaries and forcefully occupied those areas that it had incorporated into its new map of Tigray. It was the Ethiopian Government which subverted all Eritrean efforts to defuse the crisis and to find a peaceful bilateral solution through their Joint Border Commission by unleashing unprovoked military attacks on Eritrea from 6 to 12 May. It was the Ethiopian Government which declared war on Eritrea by a resolution of its Parliament on 13 May. It was the Government of Ethiopia which invaded Eritrea along several points on their common border. It was the Government of Ethiopia which launched an air strike on Asmara, the Eritrean capital, on 5 June 1998. It was the Ethiopian Government which imposed an air and sea blockade by threatening indiscriminate air bombing of Eritrea.

Yet Ethiopia has falsely portrayed Eritrea as an aggressor country by claiming that Eritrean forces invaded Ethiopian territory on 12 May. However, it is not claims and counter-claims that matter. There is incontrovertible material evidence which establishes that Ethiopia has deliberately used force and carried out military incursions in Eritrea since July 1997 with a view to covertly changing the reality on the ground. In this connection, I wish to bring to the Assembly's attention that the Eritrean Government has repeatedly called for an independent investigation of the incidents that triggered the conflict.

This border dispute should not have existed in the first place, considering that boundaries between the two States are some of the most clearly defined in Africa and were made by explicit and detailed provisions of international treaties. They were then confirmed by the United Nations when it created the ill-fated Eritrean-Ethiopian federation, and again clearly defined in the Constitution that the United Nations gave to Eritrea.

True, the borders may not have been demarcated; but they are not the only undemarcated borders in Africa, and the non-demarcation of boundaries has not prevented most African — and indeed other — States from living in peace with their neighbours and from solving their problems peacefully.

Eritrea is committed to a peaceful and legal solution of this dispute on the basis of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of States which are enshrined in the charters of both the United Nations and the OAU as well as the decisions and declarations of the OAU and the Non-Aligned Movement. Since before the onset of the crisis, Eritrea has been attempting to initiate numerous bilateral discussions with Ethiopia with a view to addressing all outstanding issues related to their common borders. In this connection, the following must be mentioned.

First, the Eritrean Cabinet and National Assembly issued orders, on 14 and 20 May 1998 and again on 18 June 1998, respectively, for the temporary demilitarization of the areas of dispute.

Secondly, the Eritrean President sent two letters to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia requesting him to join him in defusing the dispute and settling the border issue peacefully and legally on a bilateral basis.

Thirdly, the Eritrean Government presented to the OAU Committee of Ambassadors a proposal containing the principles of respect of colonial boundaries and non-violation of these borders; respect of the charters of the OAU and the United Nations; commitment not to use force to impose a solution; commitment to peaceful and legal means to solve the dispute; readiness to stop all hostilities; and readiness to enter into direct talks without preconditions.

Unfortunately, all our efforts failed because of negative responses from Ethiopia. On the other hand, Ethiopia has yet to offer a single plan or peace proposal. It has only threatened war unless Eritrea withdraws from territories which are within the internationally recognized borders of Eritrea. In this connection, it must be mentioned that the Eritrean Government has time and again requested the Ethiopian Government to publicly announce to the peoples of Eritrea, Ethiopia and the international community the territories that it claims and to designate them on a political map with clear geographical coordinates.

It is for these reasons that the Government of Eritrea yet again offers the following as a basis for the solution of the dispute.

First, the comprehensive solution of the problem through a technical demarcation on the basis of the established colonial treaties that clearly define the boundary between the two countries.

Secondly, a possible resort to arbitration on the basis of the sanctity of colonial borders in the event that this is demanded by the other party.

Pending a lasting, legal solution, an immediate cessation of all hostilities and a ceasefire to be monitored by an observer force under the auspices of the United Nations.

It is a matter of satisfaction to the people and Government of Eritrea that numerous governmental institutions, international and regional organizations and non-governmental organizations, including the House of Representatives of the United States Congress, the European Union and the Non-Aligned Movement, have, in welcoming the Eritrean initiative, called upon both Eritrea and Ethiopia to avoid the use of force at all costs and to resolve their disputes peacefully.

I wish to declare here and now, in loud and clear terms, that the Government of Eritrea welcomes, and is ready to undertake to implement, a decision by the Assembly which provides without any preconditions for the cessation of hostilities, a ceasefire agreement and a peaceful resolution of the dispute by any method as the only acceptable solution.

In Africa, conflicts such as the present Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute have taken place several times in the past. Each one of these conflicts was addressed on the basis of the hallowed principles and decisions of the OAU, including in particular respect for colonial borders, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and the non-use of force or threat of force.

As the OAU prepares itself to enter the twenty-first century, it is imperative that its member States rededicate themselves to the sublime principles and resolutions that have hitherto served our continent. These principles and decisions, which have successfully fostered peace and stability, solved conflicts and defused tension in our continent in the past, will be as valid in the future as they have been since they were first articulated. Only through their proper application will it be possible to defuse tension and eliminate conflict.

Eritrea reiterates its commitment to peace, harmony and the rule of law in international relations, however painful this tragedy may be. Eritrea seeks peace for itself and for all of its neighbours. Eritrea will continue to seek good relations with all its neighbours.

Eritrea is in a race against the clock of development and cannot afford to lose the time, energy and resources which must be used in the war against underdevelopment. To date, Eritrea has restrained itself against extreme provocation, and it will continue to do so unless it is forced to defend itself. If aggression is committed against their country, however, Eritreans will have no choice but to defend their hard-won independence and sovereignty as well as every inch of their territory with whatever is at their disposal.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.